

# NCAA Men's Frozen Four: Wisconsin vs North Dakota

Wednesday, April 8, 2026

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

T-Mobile Arena

## Wisconsin Badgers

## Mike Hastings

## Christian Fitzgerald

## Jack Horbach

### Semifinal Pregame Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Wisconsin. Start with some thoughts from Coach Hastings on returning to the Frozen Four, what life has been like in Vegas so far.

MIKE HASTINGS: Yeah, you know what, when you start a season and everybody asks the questions, Where is the Frozen Four going to be? I'd tell as early as four weeks ago, I didn't know if we would be here, but we found a way to get here.

Obviously we're here with three of the premier programs in college hockey. We're excited to be here. All four teams have earned it, which you have to do at this time of the year.

Haven't done much. We touched down yesterday, got settled. The guys were able to get a little bit of their own time. From breakfast on it's been marching orders, not from me, just to make sure that we're getting everything done before that puck drops tomorrow.

We're excited about it. I want to thank the Vegas Knights, them allowing us to be in this building, the city of Las Vegas. We're extremely excited about it.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. What has life been like here in the Vegas?**

CHRISTIAN FITZGERALD: I have been here a couple times before. Obviously a little different experience this time around. But yeah, it's been pretty cool so far. Kind of like what Coach said, haven't really done too much outside of the hotel. Got in last night, just kind of hung out as a group, got a little sun, which is nice. Been at the rink here working. It's been great.

THE MODERATOR: Any antics to report on so far?

JACK HORBACH: No, I'm a big sweater. The heat is really taking a toll on me.

Yeah, it's been nice just to settle in, hang out with the guys here. Some of us went to see a movie last night at the hotel. It was nice. Settling in, getting ready to get going here and lock in.

THE MODERATOR: What movie were you watching?

JACK HORBACH: We watched Project Hail Mary. Pretty good movie.

THE MODERATOR: Scale of 1 to 10?

JACK HORBACH: We were talking about it this morning. We said 7.5. We're tough graders. It was good on our books.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. Mike, you said four weeks ago you weren't sure if you would get here. What made you continue to believe that you would?**

MIKE HASTINGS: Good to see you again. It's been a while.

You know what, just we've had some peaks and valleys during this season. What made me believe is really the group. Throughout the season, when we have had that valley, leadership group, everybody behind them, has done a really good job of looking in the mirror and owning what we either didn't do well, then being okay, being accountable to each other.

That group has grown a tremendous amount this year, through whether it's injuries, lack of our best play, whatever it was, they were okay saying we need to look at a mirror.

When you have that, when you have guys that are willing to do the work, if you've been around a little bit, it gives you



a better feeling in your gut that when the chips are down, the guys will show up.

They've really done a great job since we got spanked in our own building by Ohio State. They've done a really good job of focusing on the next one.

**Q. I know you come into this tournament high off the huge win over Michigan State. When I look at some outside noise, I see maybe the experts pick you as underdogs this weekend. What are your thoughts going into the tournament this weekend as underdogs?**

JACK HORBACH: I mean, we're just trying to focus on ourselves, cross those Ts and dot our Is, just sticking to our dailies, worrying about how we can improve our game, how we're going to bring it tomorrow.

I think we don't really look at ourselves as underdogs. I think we're ready to play when the puck drops tomorrow.

CHRISTIAN FITZGERALD: I think right now our focus is kind of what's going on within our room. We've got a really close family. I think that's kind of where our head's at.

The outside noise hasn't really bothered us most of the year. Kind of sticking to the same game plan and looking forward to tomorrow.

MIKE HASTINGS: You know what, we've asked these guys to just worry about what they get to control. We don't get to control that, so...

The group's done a really good job at just getting back to business when we need to. As I said in the beginning, all four teams earned their way here. We'll go about our business.

THE MODERATOR: Times have changed. We're talking about oddsmakers now. Couldn't talk about that in the day (laughter).

**Q. Players, you skated on this ice a few minutes ago. What did you think of the quality of it? Is it playing fast, slow? They had to play a new surface. How did you find it?**

CHRISTIAN FITZGERALD: Yeah, I mean, when there's four teams skating on the ice, it's going to be a little choppy. Obviously at the end of the day all four teams are playing on the same rink so...

Obviously it was good to get out there, get our legs under ourselves. Sweat it out a little bit.

JACK HORBACH: I agree with Christian, everybody is going to play on the same ice. We weren't really too worried about it. Just getting our legs under us, felt great to finally skate here and get it underway.

THE MODERATOR: Different than the Kohl Center?

JACK HORBACH: Not much different.

CHRISTIAN FITZGERALD: It's a little warmer here.

THE MODERATOR: Did you notice the ice, Mike?

MIKE HASTINGS: No, I didn't. We talked about this quite a lot of different times. They've got an NHL guy here that knows what he's doing. To me, I'm just going to say this, it's hard to do what you just brought up for any ice crew. I don't care where it's at. We've talked about this at regionals for years, when they've got to lay a different logo on the ice, it's a tough task.

Yeah, it is what it is. We're going to make the best of it.

**Q. Hearing that it's Big Ten against NCHC in both of these games. The Big Ten hasn't won a championship. What do you feel about that, about representing the Big Ten as a conference that has success in the other sports?**

JACK HORBACH: Yeah, I mean, it's a big honor and we're super grateful for our opportunity. We're just looking to get underway. We're pretty excited to be here and just get our work done.

CHRISTIAN FITZGERALD: Yeah, I think honestly our focus is probably more on just representing Wisconsin and the Badgers as a whole.

I wouldn't say here too focused on necessarily representing the Big Ten. Obviously it's an extreme honor to be a part of the Big Ten. At the end of the day we're representing Wisconsin, the guys within the room.

**Q. You had a long break before the regionals. Couple week break after that. What have you done in terms of knocking off the rust, worrying about the rust?**

JACK HORBACH: Yeah, our coaching staff and just all the staff around us and our resources have done a great job of just keeping us in shape, worrying about what we can control, how everyone is feeling inside our room.

That's mostly been our focus, is feeling the best we can and getting ready.



CHRISTIAN FITZGERALD: Yeah, I don't think it was really knocking off rust. I think it was more just keeping us sharp over the last few weeks. Our practices are extremely detailed, so I think it's just kind of going out each day we skate and focusing on those little details, just getting one day closer to tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Mike, a little different staccato? How do you approach it as a coach?

MIKE HASTINGS: A little bit of balance. I'd like to say it's the first time I've been through that. We've screwed up enough in the Playoffs that we've had a couple of these.

Learning from previous times, prior to us going into the regional in Worcester, two years previous to that we had to go through it. We adjusted some things.

Give a lot of credit to Tommy Inkrott our strength coach. We sat down and went through really the calendar of what we did previously to what we were going to do this year.

The guys, always go back to the guys, because if you put something in front of them, if they're willing to buy in, they're the ones that have to do the work. So we tried to balance our weeks, the two weeks, with our workloads over three-day windows, then get a rest.

I believe the guys are in a really good spot. It showed at Worcester. Hopefully it's going to show tomorrow.

**Q. What was going through your minds on the last night of the championships for all the leagues where you didn't know where you were in with upsets, you had to sit and wait for those results?**

CHRISTIAN FITZGERALD: Yeah, we actually got together as a team and just kind of watched those games kind of unfold. Obviously once we saw that Dartmouth result, we knew we were in. We were all pretty fired up and excited for the opportunity.

Obviously it was something that we weren't going to take for granted after kind of sweating it out to get in. But yeah, obviously did a pretty good job there in Worcester. We're excited to get going.

JACK HORBACH: Yeah, when we all got together, we were all watching, enjoying the games. We kind of knew what situation we put ourselves in. It was not up to us to decide. We were sitting there hoping. Once we got that chance, we all got together and talked about how we can't take anything for granted, take our opportunity and put our best foot forward every single time.

THE MODERATOR: Celebrated?

JACK HORBACH: Absolutely.

**Q. Five minutes left to go, down 3-1 to Michigan State. Is it, Oh, crap, or, Okay, we got this?**

THE MODERATOR: Who wants to take that one, boys?

CHRISTIAN FITZGERALD: I think we have so much trust in one another. Obviously put ourselves in a bit of a tough spot there, being down two goals with five minutes left. I don't think our trust or belief in each other wavered for a moment.

We knew just kind of had to keep pushing, eventually beat pot one, pot two. For the most part it was staying even-keeled and trusting it was going to come.

JACK HORBACH: Just the trust we have in each other, within our family, it's just unbelievable. Once that happened we knew we had to just stick to it. Just our preparation and everything, that's something amazing could happen, and that's what happened.

THE MODERATOR: Down two late in the game, pulling the goaltender, has your philosophy changed over the years?

MIKE HASTINGS: It's changed a little bit. I don't know if the guys want to talk about it. We've gone over that plan well before five minutes, when you're looking down and seeing the goaltender down at the other end.

I will say this. I thought it started before we scored the second goal. I thought we put a lot of pressure. They had to relief pressure through some icings. You could feel it a little bit on the bench.

I wish they'd have shared with me that's what was going to happen, I would have enjoyed that block between eight minutes and five a little bit more.

At the end of the day there is, I'll echo one thing, I'm a big believer in actions, not words. They've showed that before. We were in State, down by two. There were different times this year where we've been counted out before. The group stuck together. They've been rewarded for it. That is an experience I think that is beneficial for our guys.

It definitely was in that second game in the regional.

**Q. Mike, part of the motivation getting here is to give Schultz a chance. Did you have any conversations**



**with him about his mood coming into that weekend given that motivation factor? Do you think he'll be available tomorrow?**

MIKE HASTINGS: I've had a boatload of conversations with that young man. I'm going all the way back from when he got out of procedure at Notre Dame and our team had to go. We've stayed in constant communication about where he's at.

I do believe part of my responsibility or our responsibility as a program is to put young people in positions to succeed. He asked them to do the work. He has done all the work. Now we've been talking daily, checking in.

Will he be available tomorrow? We'll talk tonight and figure out what worry going to do for tomorrow. We try not to put the cart ahead of the horse. This has been a process that both of us committed to with our unbelievable training staff and doctors that are here. With his effort, he's put himself in a position to be in that conversation. When it happened, we were hoping that would be the case, and that's the case.

**Q. What's tonight like? Do you go dream with scoring goals tomorrow? Hasty, what is tomorrow like when the bright lights turn on, what do you say to your players?**

CHRISTIAN FITZGERALD: Yeah, I think after this go back, get a bite to eat, get a little homework done. Other than that, probably lay low, hang out for the rest of the day. Go for a nice dinner tonight. Be fun to be with the guys and be in Vegas. Go to bed tonight and look forward for our opportunity tomorrow.

JACK HORBACH: Yeah, I mean, do you know where we're going to eat tonight? We got a nice dinner tonight. I was lucky enough to finish all my homework last week, so just kind of spend some time with the boys, chitchat about who knows what. Get a good night's sleep and get ready to go tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Where is dinner tonight, coach?

MIKE HASTINGS: Capital Grille.

**Q. What do you say tomorrow to the fellas?**

MIKE HASTINGS: You know what, at this time this is them going out. You hope in February you turn the keys over. That's pretty much what we've done. They're a responsible group. They've focused on their dailies, as these guys have brought up. Tomorrow's an unbelievable opportunity, just like the opportunity we had in Worcester on Thursday

and on Saturday.

They've done the work. They've put in the time. Now go be the best version of us. Through the peaks and valleys of the game, stick together.

We talk a lot about no tears at the end of the year. No regrets because you've put everything that you can put into it. If you do that, you can live with it. So this group's done a phenomenal job at focusing on what they get to control. They'll do the same thing tonight. Enjoy a meal as a family. Go about it. The sun comes up tomorrow, little bit earlier start than usual. Our group has adjusted to those things really well over this time here in the last couple of weeks. I know they want to grasp that opportunity and make sure we're here trying to play on Saturday.

**Q. Mike, earlier in the year you talked about 'we people' as opposed to 'me people'. When you're down two to Michigan State late, you have to hope you have enough 'we people' to get the job done?**

MIKE HASTINGS: First, it's really good to see you. I love what you do for college hockey, your love for BU. It's good to see you. I love being a guest on your show. Love what you do.

The piece of that that you said, we don't play the game. The coaching staff doesn't play the game. That was taken away a long time ago.

So yeah, it's really a trust. At the time you just kind of back up. You let them be what they are. This group's done a really good job at that.

The piece of it that a lot of people don't get to see, we get criticized at times when we don't get done what people think we should get done, those are moments you don't get to teach. They're somewhat painful in relation to sports, not life. They're somewhat painful when you go through that. The guys have done all the work. They don't get the results.

I do think it prepares you. To see that group go through that and be rewarded for that is one that you keep turning the heat up on the fire a little bit. You say, Hey, listen, fellas, when you're the best versions of yourselves you're pretty good.

Hopefully that builds our confidence, but not an arrogance and they take advantage of the opportunity in front of them.

**Q. Coach, in the previous press conference, it was brought up about an evening one night between Wisconsin and North Dakota. You were not obviously**

**ASAP** . . . when all is said, we're done.®  
sports

**directly involved in that. Have people come up to you and talked about that night, "You gotta go those guys"?**

MIKE HASTINGS: I think there's one reason whether we go to school, they ask all of us to study history, right? I had a little bit of a history minor.

What I'll tell you is great about it, the guys of that age, a lot of guys that were playing in that game, whether they're alumni, for me in Wisconsin fans that have continued to stay on the bus of Badgers, and then even some guys that grew up in Crookston, Minnesota, which is 21 miles away from Grand Forks.

Our game is a small community. When you can talk about the ones where we didn't have social media, it wasn't instantaneous. My guess is that's grown a little bit from what it actually was. But there is a genuine let's just say I don't want to say hatred, but I'm going to say one that when you play somebody that many times, that many meaningful games, it's the same thing that's going to happen tomorrow, you know?

We'll keep the water bottles on the bench. I know both teams are going to try and represent their university so they can be proud. Maybe that game gets played all over again tomorrow. I don't know.

THE MODERATOR: That was 47 years ago. Christian and Jack, do you know anything we're talking about here right now?

CHRISTIAN FITZGERALD: I've seen a couple clips. That's about it, honestly (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: You guys weren't even a thought yet.

**Q. Mike, it's been talked about how all four starting goaltenders here are freshmen. How unique of a situation is that from your experience? What can you say about your freshman goaltender?**

MIKE HASTINGS: Again, I forget a lot of things. I don't remember -- I know I wasn't a part of anything that had four freshmen goaltenders playing at this time of the year.

THE MODERATOR: It never happened.

MIKE HASTINGS: Now that one's been around and detailed. So thanks.

Our goaltender, you know what, when he came in, if you've had an opportunity to meet him, talking to him, and these guys I think would back it up, he's about as calm a water as

you're going to find.

Those stories about goaltenders being different than everybody else, I'm experienced some of those, too. This one in that locker room, whether we've won, we've lost, he's crushed it, he's had a rough night, he just kind of stays even-keeled. I'm going to tell you as a coach, these guys can probably talk as a guy that's playing in front of them, you respect that.

The second piece of that is he crushes everything that he controls. His diet, his preparation. He's a 'we' guy. Came out of the gates hot. Had a little bump in the road. Found a way to keep another one out of the net in the regional that didn't allow them to get to 4. That's a winner. He's done that over time. We feel comfortable with him being the guy leading us out tomorrow.

CHRISTIAN FITZGERALD: Obviously we have a lot of trust in him. Kind of seeing what he did in the W coming in, his numbers, they were very impressive. Yeah, I think kind of what Coach said, just the kind of person he is, he keeps it pretty light. I think that's calming about him.

We know he's going to be there to make the next save. We have trust in him. I don't think that's shaken all year.

JACK HORBACH: Yeah, I mean, just his presence around the locker room and outside the rink, he's a leader in his own way and he's only a freshman. You can tell it's been growing throughout the year. Just having that calm presence back there, whether he messes up, makes a really good play and saves our butts. He's always thinking about the next. He always has our backs and we'll always have his.

Just having a guy like that in your locker room, between the pipes, it always boosts the mentality in the room.

THE MODERATOR: We'll let you guys go. Thank you very much. We'll see you back here tomorrow.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports